

#39

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GROUP I ----- THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR

TOPIC NO. 8

CRITICISM

OF

GENERAL FIUJI'S ESTIMATE
OF THE RUSSIAN ARMY IN THE
LIGHT OF THE ADVANCE TO AND
DURING THE BATTLE OF THE YALU

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Before attempting to criticize General Fuji's estimate of the Russian Army based upon the advance to, and the crossing of, the Yalu, it will be well to briefly review the operations concerned. They will be discussed in greater detail by other speakers.

(1) The Yalu flows generally in a southwesterly direction across the base of the Korean peninsula and empties into the Yellow Sea. It forms part of the boundary between Korea and Manchuria. In its lower reaches the river is unfordable and offers a very considerable obstacle to any military operation. The country is broken and hilly. In 1904 the roads were few in number and almost impassable in the springtime. Any advance from the south would have to be made paralleling the sea in order not to be too far away from bases of supply. This, of necessity, would bring the invading force to the Yalu near its mouth.

(7) In April, 1904, Lieutenant General Sassulitch, in command of the Russian Eastern Detachment, consisting at this time of about 15,000 infantry, 5,000 cavalry and 60 guns, had placed Major General Kasahtalinsky with about 6,000 infantry, 1,000 cavalry and
(13) 16 guns near the junction of the Yalu and Aiho rivers with instructions to intrench himself on the north bank of the Yalu near its junction with the Aiho. The front assigned this force was about twenty-four (24) miles.

General Kuroki's First Japanese Army had landed under protection of the fleet at several points on the western coast of Korea, the major portion landing at Chinampo and Chemulpo. The landing was
(8) completed on the 29th of March and consisted of three reinforced divisions - - about 40,000 men with 20 howitzers, in addition to the
(9) artillery of the divisions. The Japanese started their advance northward towards the Yalu, being preceded by an advance guard of one brigade of infantry and a regiment of cavalry.

The roads were almost impassable and the army was able to advance only about five miles a day. The Russians had placed a

(18) force of cavalry south of the Yalu but offered little, if any, opposition to the advance, contenting themselves in keeping in touch with the advancing enemy without making any serious effort to delay it.

(19) The problem of supply for the Japanese advance guard had become so serious, owing to the condition of the roads, that its size had been materially decreased. It dribbled into Wiju, on the south bank of the Yalu between April 8th and 13th and upon the latter date consisted of two batteries of artillery, one regiment of cavalry and one regiment of infantry. For several days after its concentration at Wiju it was out of supporting distance of its main force and by prompt action of the part of the Russians could probably have been destroyed. The Russians had collected the boats along the Yalu and had them along the north bank. They had the means of crossing in force had they wished to do so. Sir Ian Hamilton, British observer has stated that he questioned the Japanese regarding their sending this small advance guard so far ahead of the main body. He was informed that it was felt necessary to secure the roads well in advance of the main body and the ports along the coast paralleling the main road; that they felt Russian inertia would prevent their attacking this force before the arrival of the main body. This estimate was correct for the Russians made no serious objection to its presence, notwithstanding the fact that across the Yalu within cannon shot, they had a force of upwards of 7,000 -- including cavalry, infantry and artillery, and within twenty-four hours could have trebled their infantry and guns. This Russian inactivity has remained a mystery. They could have certainly delayed the Japanese advance through Korea and they could undoubtedly have destroyed the Japanese advance guard by prompt and vigorous action. They passed up this golden opportunity and were content to await the arrival of the entire Japanese force, which arrived and completed its concentration in the vicinity of Wiju on April 20th.

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(8) The Japanese wanted a full ten days to complete their arrangements for crossing. They left nothing to chance in the way of preparations and at the same time endeavored to keep the Russian force in ignorance of their plans. A small force was sent up the river some thirty miles and at the same time the Japanese Navy made a demonstration at the mouth of the Yalu in the vicinity of Antung (17) as far up as small boats could ascend. These measures seemed to keep the Russians in uncertainty as to the probable place of crossing and they tried to hold the twenty-four mile river line by distribution in length but with little depth.

(15) During the period between April 20th and 30th, the Japanese constructed ten bridges over the Aiho and Yalu. These bridges utilized islands in the rivers and varied in length from 33 to 287 yards and required from eight to forty-five hours to build. Still the Russians seemed uncertain as to where the crossing would be attempted and kept their force dispersed along the river.

The crossing was made on the morning of May first and was successful. Since it will be described in detail later on, no description of the action will be made at this time.

(22) You will remember from Major Andrus' talk that the Japanese did not have a very high opinion of their enemy. Let us look into some of the action and measures taken by the Russians for the defense of the river line.

The German Official Account makes the following comment upon the instructions sent to General Sassulitch from The Russian Army Headquarters: "On the one hand he was certainly enjoined not to enter into an unequal contest - while on the other the distinct desire was expressed that he should maintain his position. Directions, orders, instructions and remarks reached the eastern detachment from Army Headquarters almost daily. This constant interference with the authority of subordinates which did not hesitate to order about individual battalions, batteries and sections of batteries,

(14) caused the leaders of the Eastern detachment no longer to order the smallest alterations on their own initiative, but, by reason of this tutelage always first asked permission from Army Headquarters. No wonder that in this way the self reliance and initiative of the inferior grades as well as of the private soldiers were reduced to a very low level, especially when, as in the Russian Army, there is in itself little inclination to act spontaneously. This could not be otherwise than fatally felt throughout the campaign" It would see them General Fiuji's estimate as to lack of initiative was correct.

(2) During the six weeks prior to the crossing, while time was still available, only a small amount of defensive work was done. (3) There were some simple trenches at various points. Guns were not (4) placed in concealed positions. Little effort was made at concealment. Tiger Hill, a high hill mass at the junction of the Aiho and Yalu, (9) which commanded both valleys and was the key to the position, was not fortified. It was, in fact, abandoned shortly after the arrival of the Japanese, was afterward retaken and occupied by a small force which constructed a few simple trenches. This force again abandoned (16) this key position at the start of the attack after receiving a few rounds of artillery fire.

Although the Russian position along the Yalu was 24 miles (10) long, the Japanese attack occupied a front of between six and seven (5) miles but the Russian dispositions were such that only about 6000 (6) men of a force of upwards of 20,000 of the Eastern detachment took part in the actual defense.

General Fuiji had estimated that the Russian infantrymen were poor marksmen and depended largely upon ineffective volley fire. Such proved to be the case. Sir Ian Hamilton, the British Observer, (11) has this to say: "It was not until the Japanese reached the Aiho that the infantry joined in with its fire and then opened with volleys. The River should have been filled with dead and dying since the defenders had the precise range. Actually, however, little damage was

done".

(12) General Fuiji's estimate contained the following remarks concerning the Russian soldier. "If they meet with any little reverse they are at once panic stricken and run away in confusion." In this respect he proved to be mistaken. After the crossing the Russian rear guard was driven into a deep valley from which there seemed no escape. To quote again from Sir Ian Hamilton: "The Russians here refused to give in. The bravery of this rear guard, who, by their devotion saved the troops retiring from Antung, will remain a glorious memory to the Russian people for no individual among them seems to have thought of surrender."

On the whole we may conclude that General Fuiji's estimate was essentially correct. Especially so in regard to leadership and the ineffectiveness of infantry fire and that this estimate had a considerable bearing upon the Japanese action and its success.

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